bit.ly/justevilthings

Expect the Unexpected!

A process for managing unplanned work.

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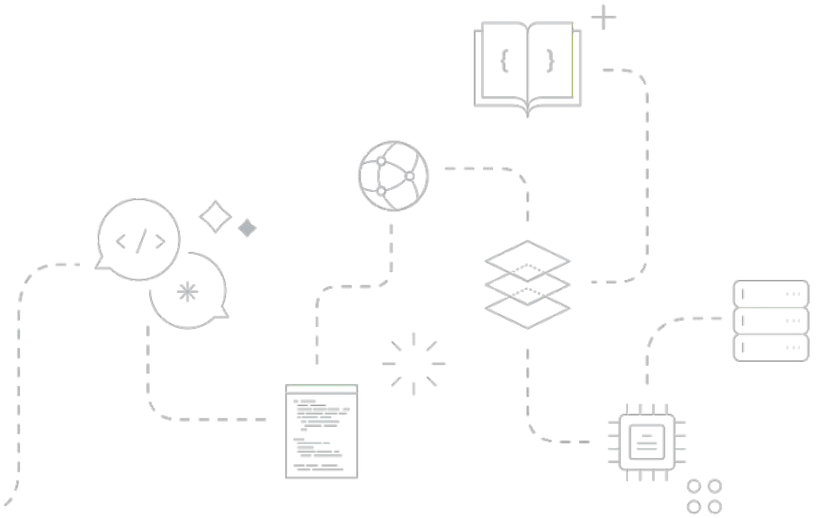
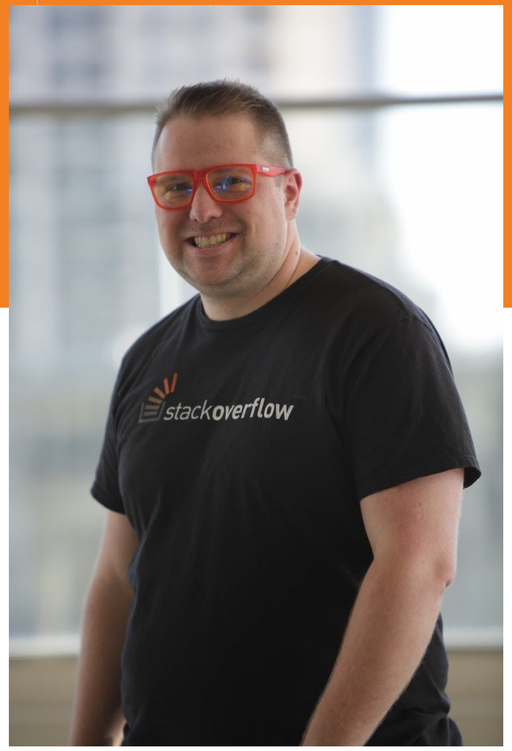


I Am Not A Hero



Hello

I am Dan O'Boyle

Internal Support Engineer

Stack Overflow

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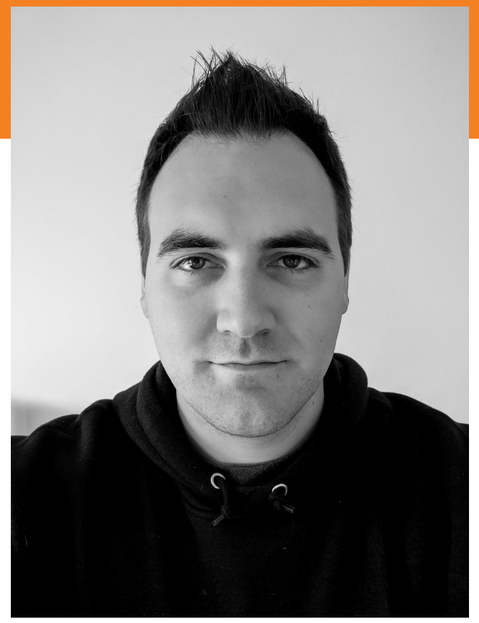

Hello

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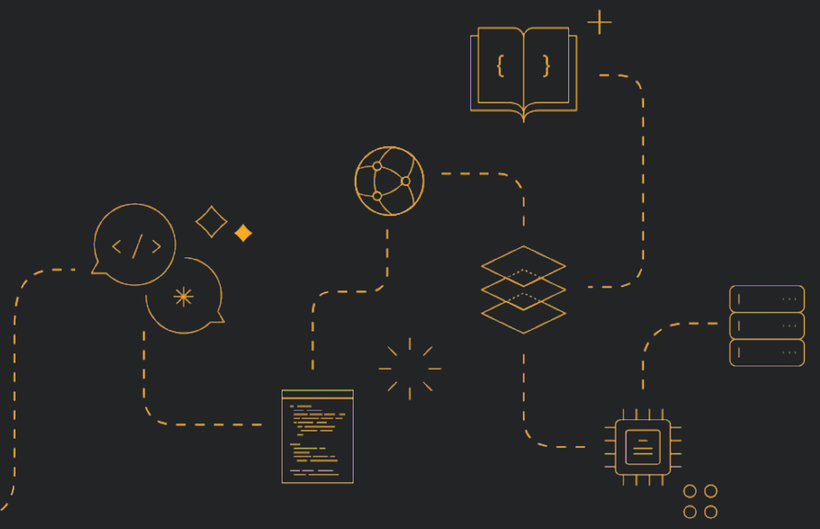
What is this Talk about?

1. Problem Statement - Unexpected work
2. The Solution - The Lawful Evil Method
   a. This is the method our team uses at Stack
3. How You can implement it too!

1.

How did we even start talking about this?

The Story Behind This Talk



1.

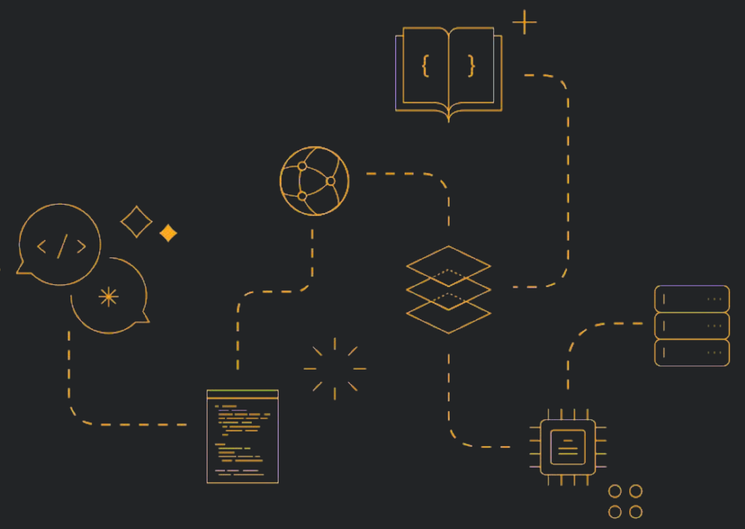
The Magic Work Fountain

stackoverflow

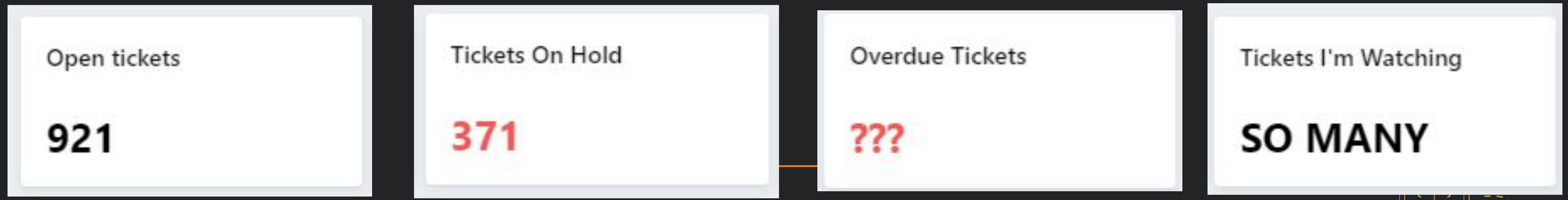
1.

THINGS JUST HAPPEN

No one knows where the work comes from, how it's prioritized, or how it gets done.



Does your ticketing system look like this?



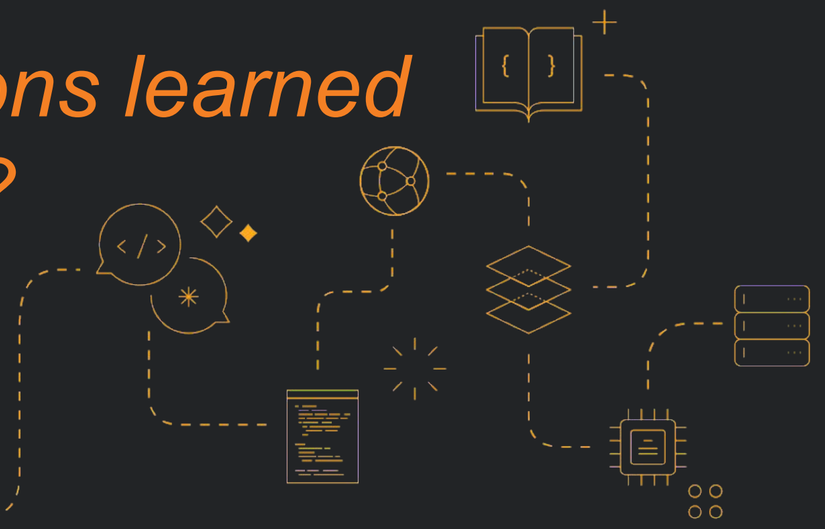
How Can We Solve This?

1.

Problem Statement

GO Read The Phoenix Project!

How can we practically apply lessons learned from DevOps Literature?

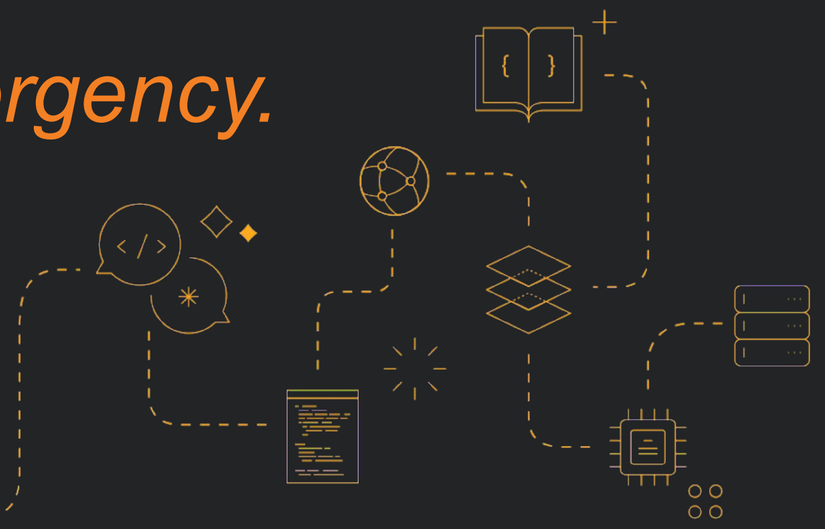


2.

Rewording our problem

When everything is an emergency..

Nothing can actually be an Emergency.



2.

In the Event of an Emergency

We look for Heros

2.

Engineers Are Not Heroes

Heros arrive just in time to save the day

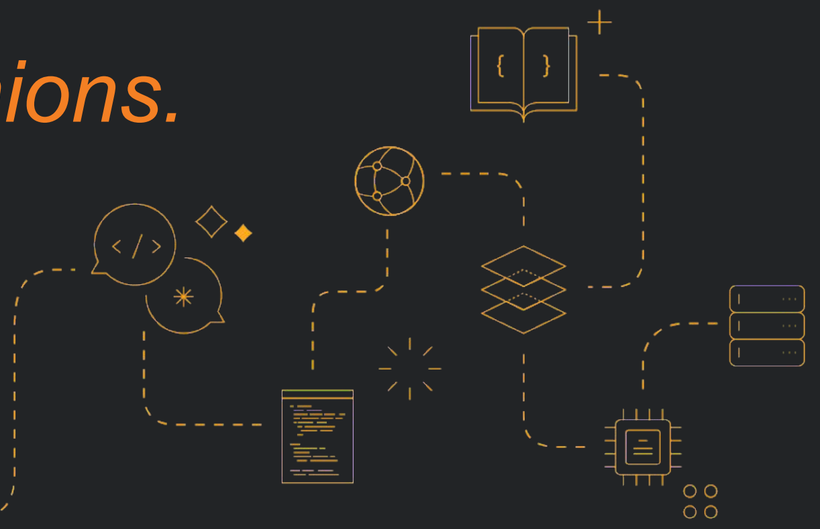
- Engineers don’t do Emergencies
  - But we often have lots of ‘unplanned work’
- Engineering teams Don’t like surprises.
  - Good Engineers Plan
  - Great Engineers have contingencies

2.

How can we practically apply lessons learned from DevOps Literature?

Let’s Create an opinionated Method

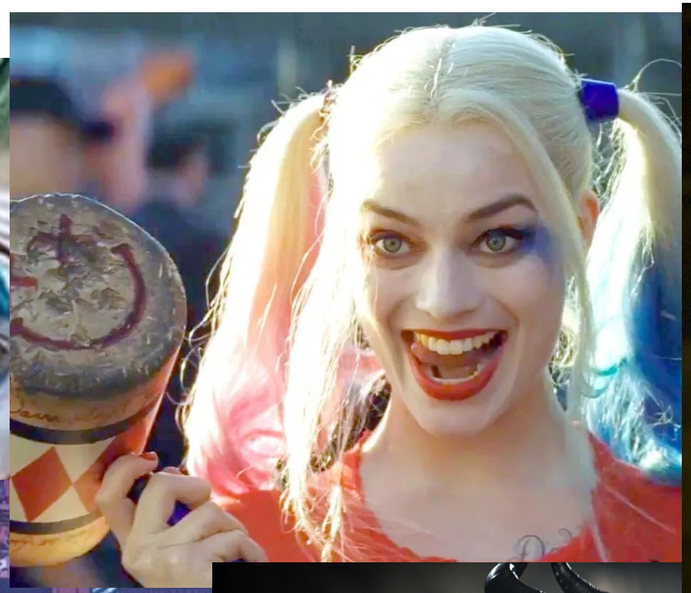
Engineers are GREAT at opinions.

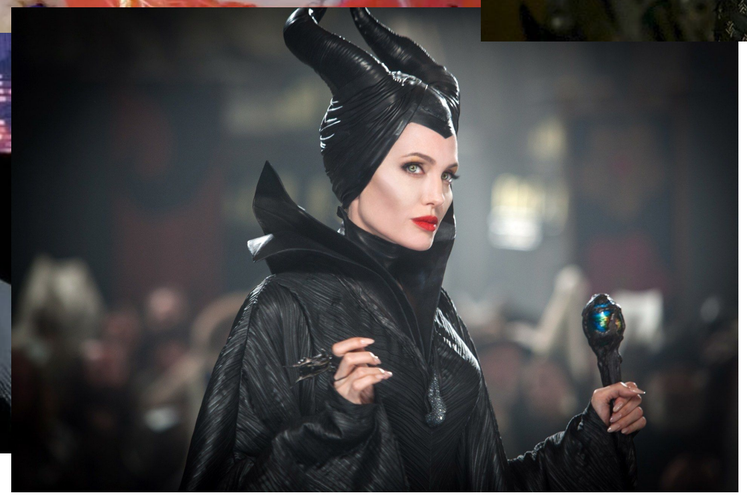


2.

So, If we’re not the Heros…

Let’s Be Evil.





2.

Engineers are GREAT at Planning

Some might even say, Diabolical!

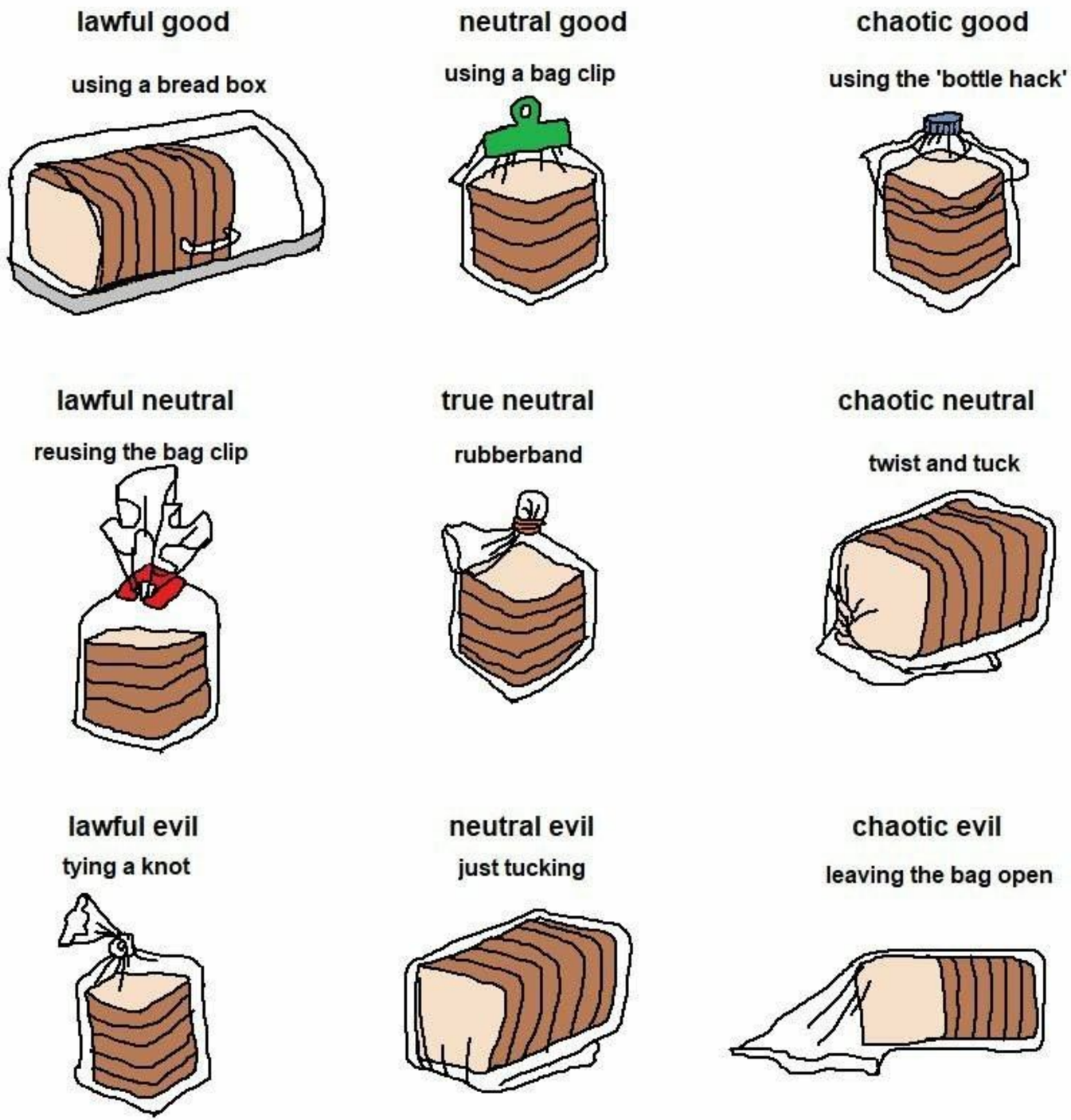
- Engineers should strive to be Super Villains.
- Planning avoids unintentional Heroism.
  - Heroism leads to rushed solutions
- Heroism is a fast track to Martyrdom
- No one wants to be a martyr
  - Working with martyrs is also difficult.

2.

A Certain Kind of Evil...

Lawful-Evil, to be specific.

- Have well defined Rules
  - ...Maliciously Comply
- Help those who can’t help themselves
  - Often Before they need it.
- Work against Chaos
  - By any means Necessary.



2.

WARNING: LIVE DEMO

2.

A Cycle of Villainy

What Just Happened? How does this all work?

Meta Meeting | Cycle Start | Cycle End

Pre-Cycle

Weekly Super Villain Elected

Changes to the process?

Adjust Due Dates on Unplanned work.

Start of Cycle

Review New Business

Acknowledge Completed Cards

Assign Work Due this Cycle

End of Cycle

Review New Business

Acknowledge Completed Cards

Update Incomplete Work

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2.

Various Lane Types

Work in progress moves from Left to right.

New Business

“Unrefined Material”

- Announcements for the next meeting
- Problems with no defined solution
- Unidentified “complaints”

Unplanned

“Work that has been reviewed but not assigned.

- Contains a due-date,
- at least 1 associated team member,
- goals that can be completed in 1 “cycle”
  - where a cycle is defined as the time between team standups.

Blocked

“Can not move forward due to outside factors.”

- Blocked card must have a clearly defined unblock task
- Possibly send alerts to slack / notify team or manager

Responsibility Lanes

“Categorized work, completed per cycle”

- 1 Responsibility Lane per type of Work Estimate.
- Capacity of lane should be estimated by
- $number_of_workers * $amount_of_this_work_per_cycle

Tracking Lanes

“Not Cycle dependant work”

- Kept for reference
- Items to be aware of, but not completed on a specific cycle.

Complete

“Finished products go here”

- Cards need somewhere to go after they’re completed.
- Easily found if a completed task needs to be revisited.
- Managers can see all the work you do!

2.

WARNING: LIVE DEMO
Part - 2

2.

Iteration Across Cycles

Winning is for Heroes… Engineers Iterate.

Meta Meeting

Cycle 1

Meta Meeting

Cycle 2

Meta Meeting

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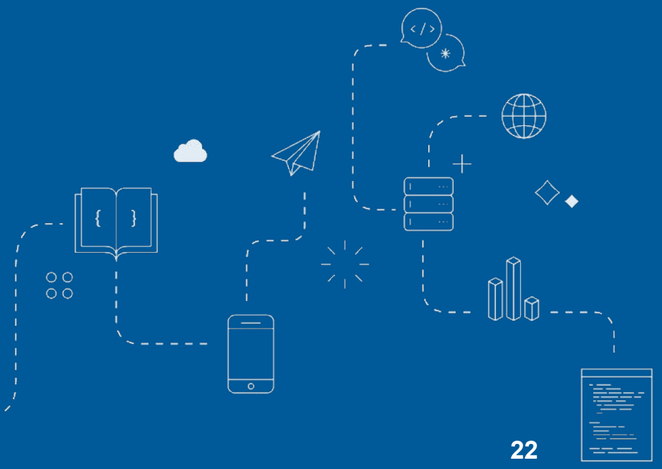
2.

Lessons Learned while being Evil

Planning Meetings are not for Disagreements.



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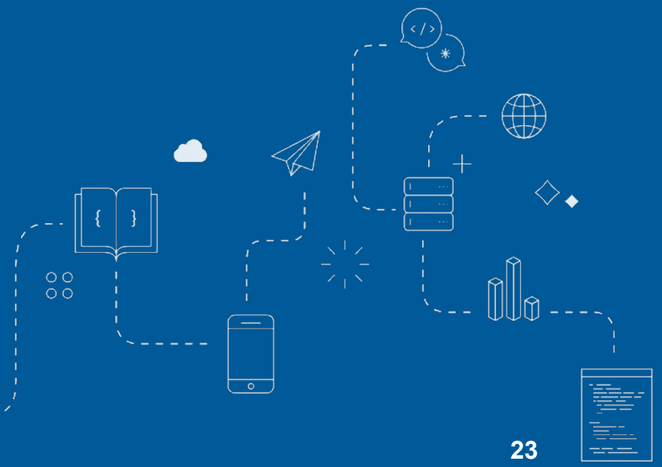
2.

Lessons Learned while being Evil

When did we start having meetings to have meetings?

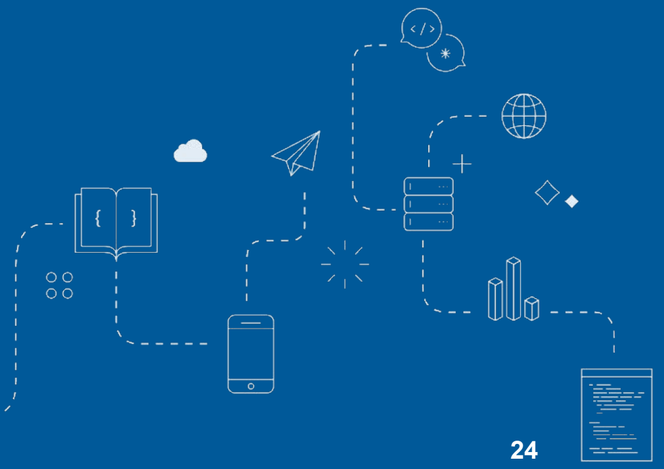


2.

Lessons Learned while being Evil

You sent me a meeting without an agenda?

I've killed men for less.



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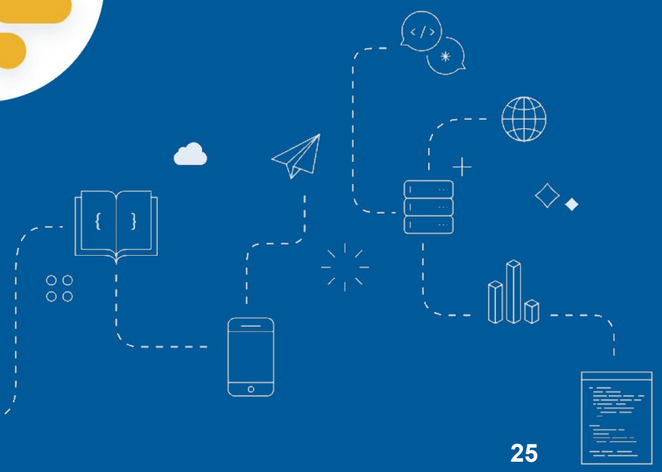
2.

Lessons Learned while being Evil

Let your Process Define your Tools.

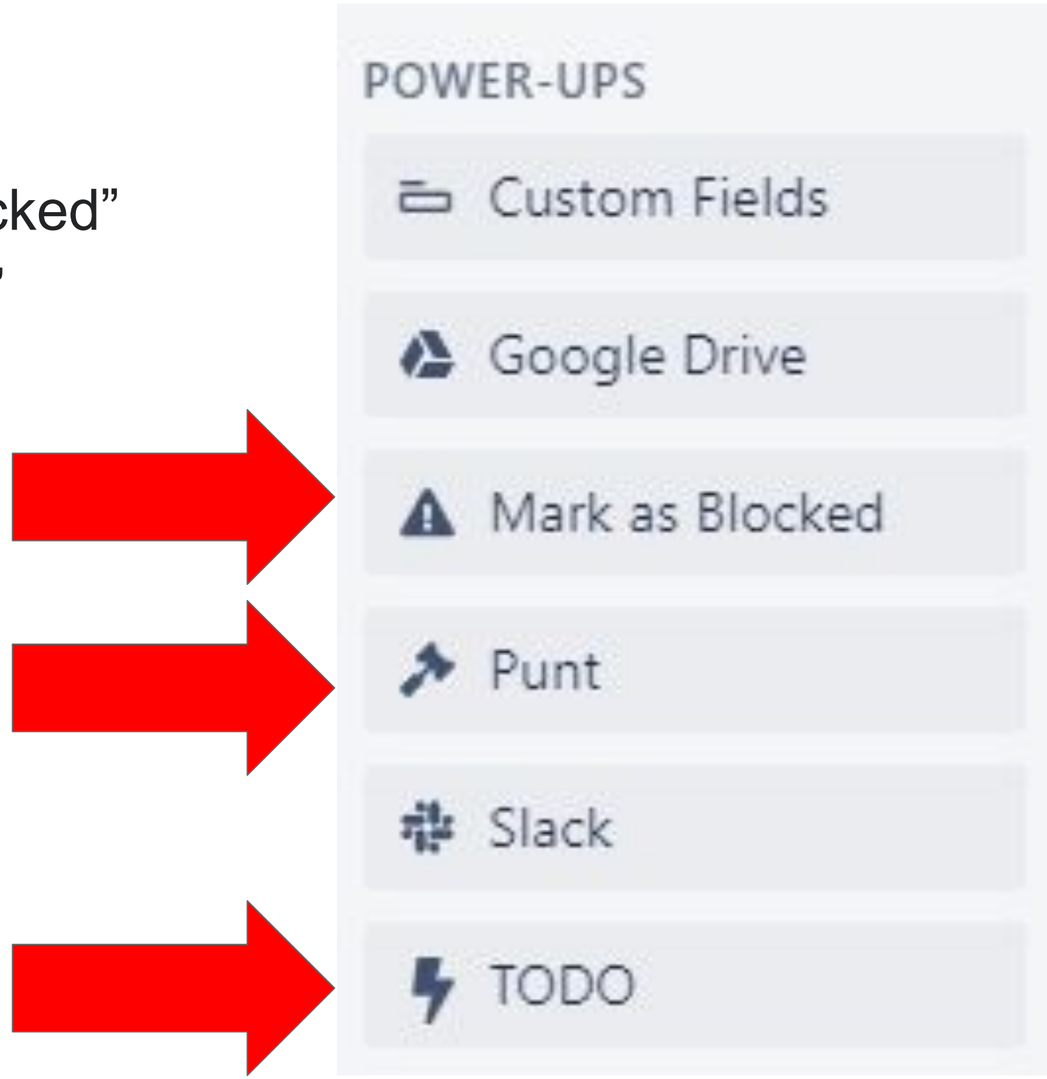


2. Trello Power-ups

- A Button for Marking Cards as Blocked
  - Blocked cards have a special checklist to be “unblocked”
  - Blocked Cards return to their lane when “unblocked”

- Punting Cards
  - Punting occurs when work promised for a cycle is missed.
  - Rather than take time rescheduling and tracking how often something is punted - this button moves it forward 1 week, and counts punts.

- TODO - Makes our todo lists.



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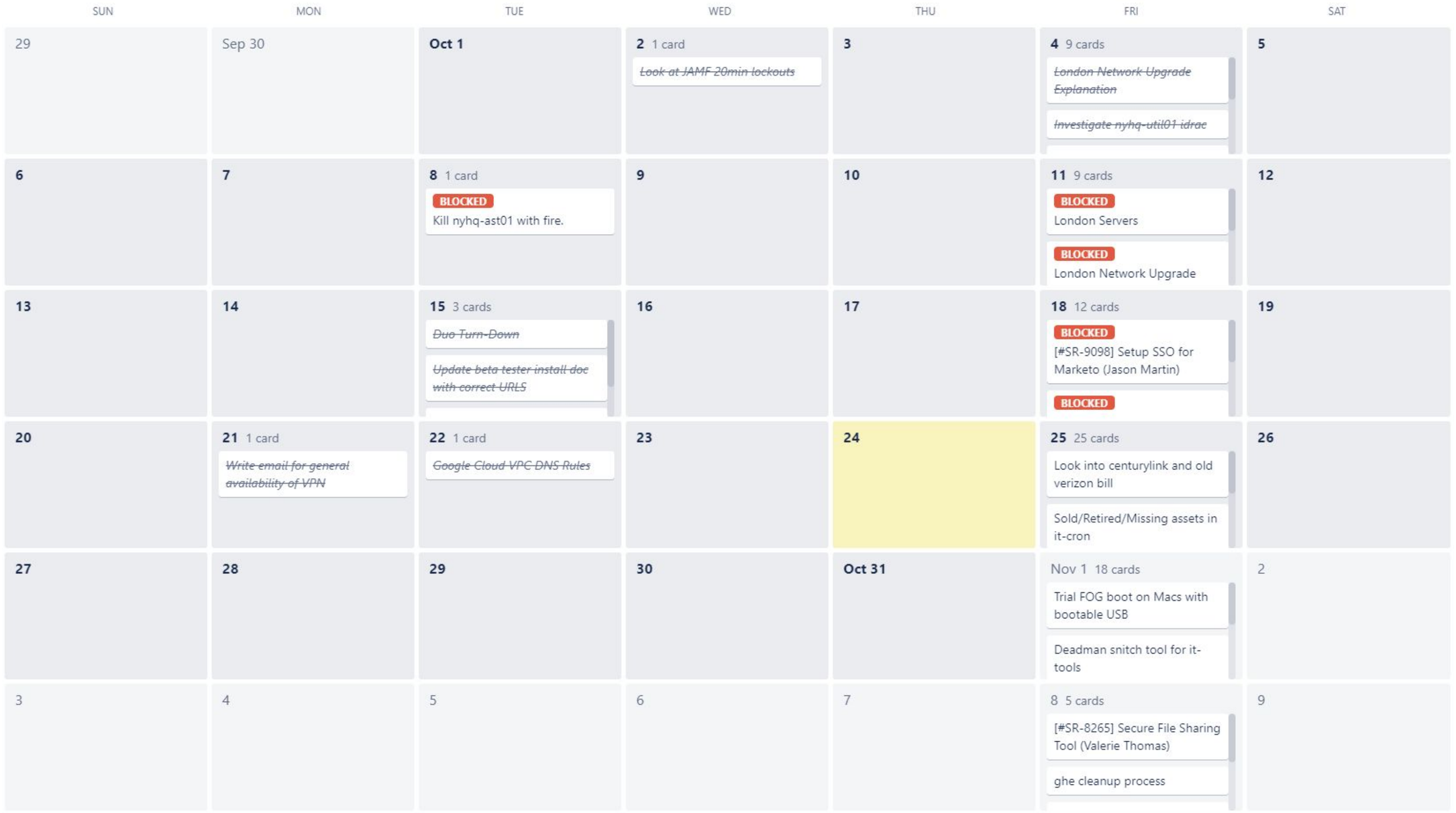
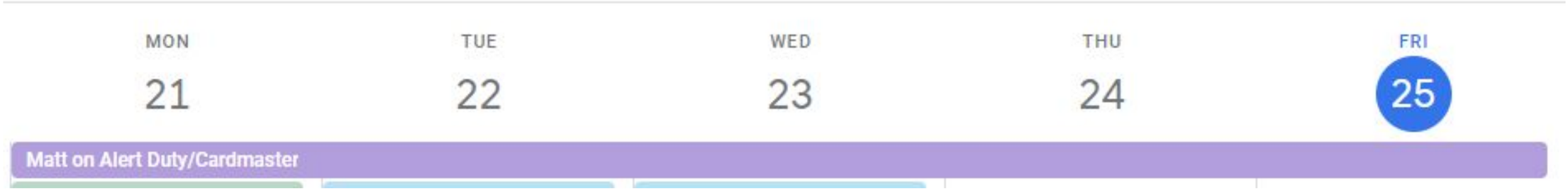
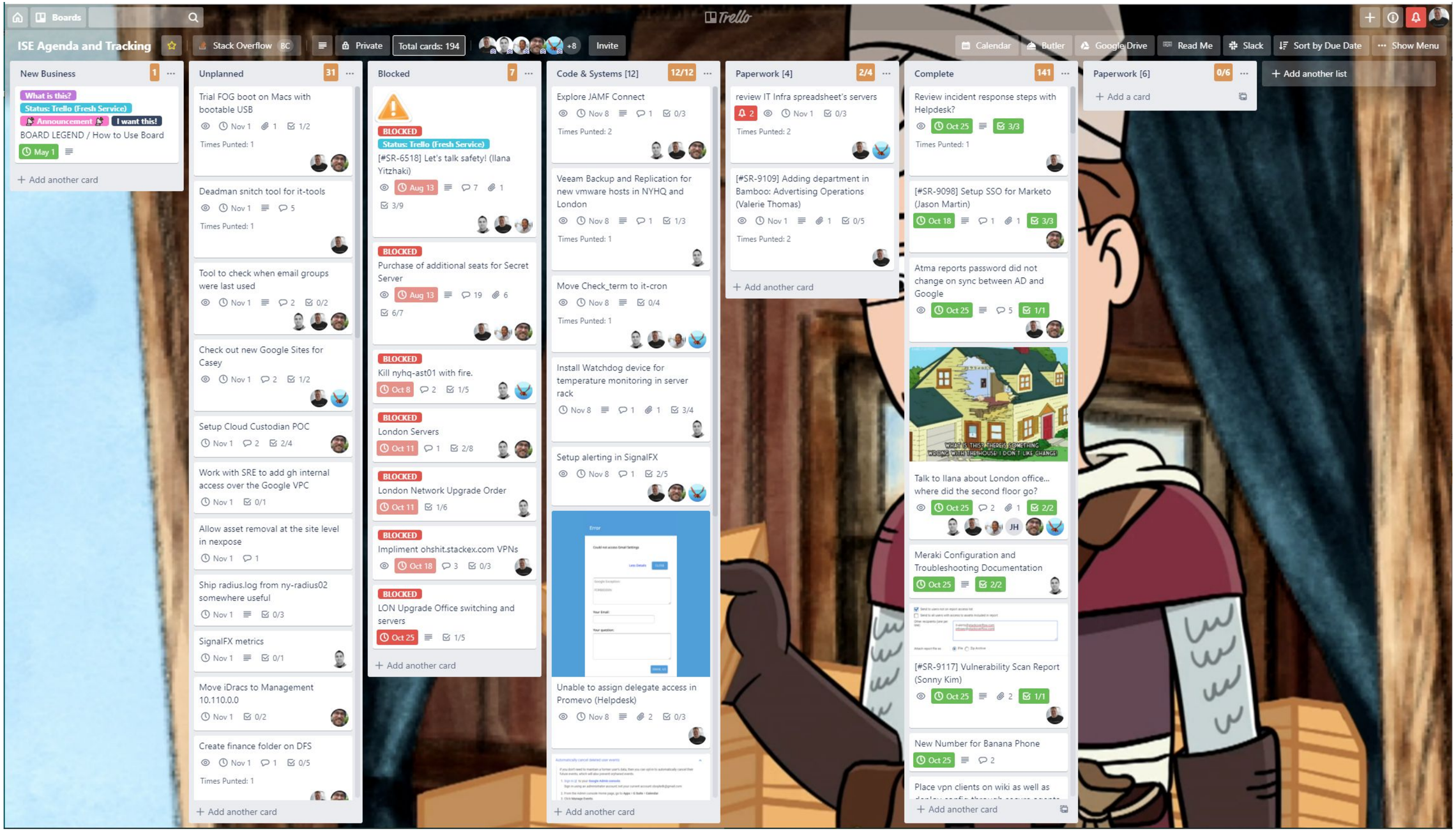


2. CardMaster Duty (Friendly term for Villain)



3. Here’s our Real Board



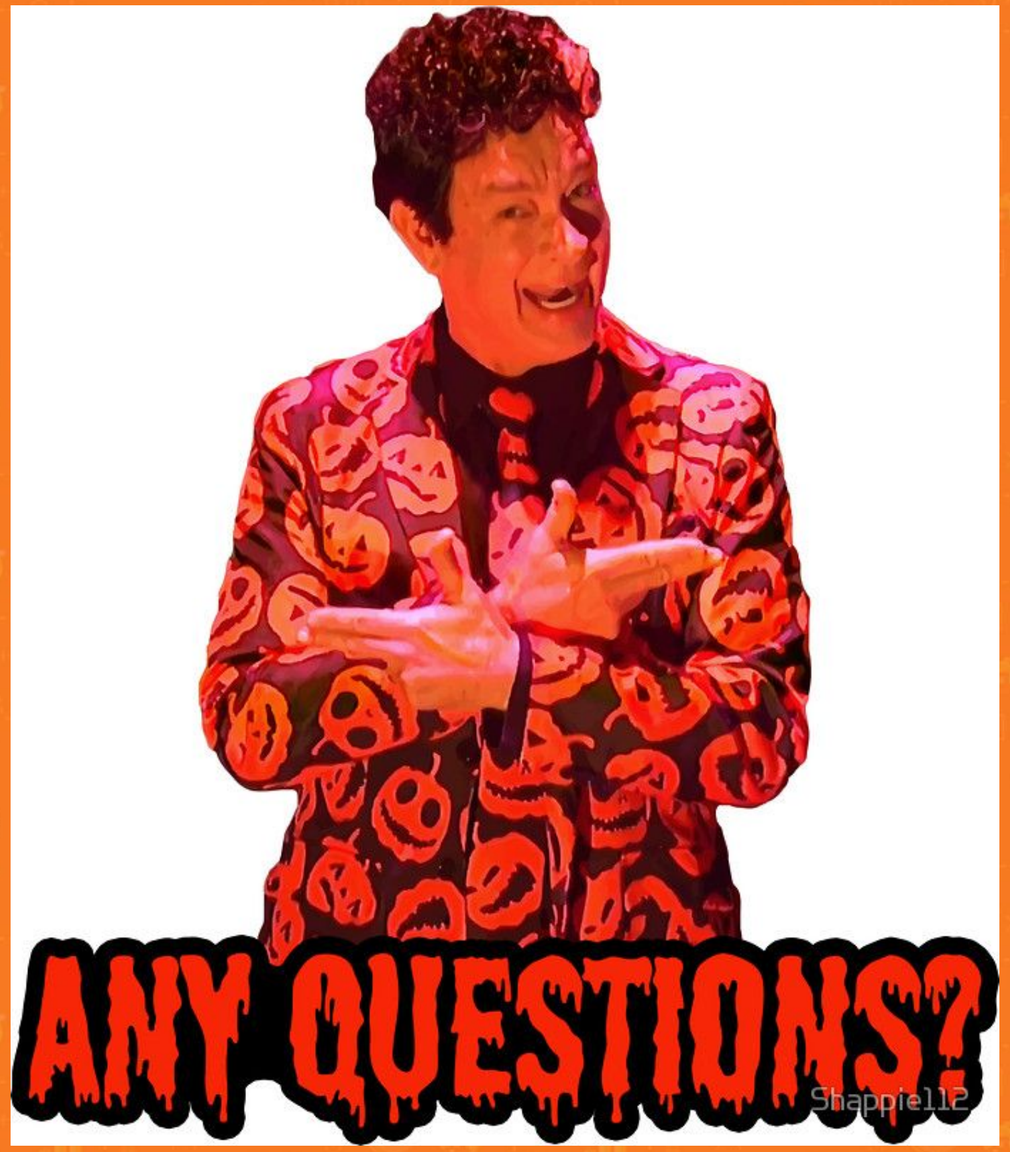
3.

Are You Ready to be a Villain?

You can be Evil too!

www.evil.cards

3.


ANY QUESTIONS?
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Thanks!

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